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Gratuity or Responsibility?

Senator Fulbright's forthright clarification of his stand on foreign economic assistance is in refreshing contrast to the carping negativism of some of his comments during recent Senate debates on Administration aid requests. Although as chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee he "can no longer actively support an aid program that is primarily bilateral," Mr. Fulbright declared in a major Senate speech on the future of aid, he would warmly support "a greatly expanded program of economic aid" if it were conducted through international channels such as the United Nations, regional development banks, and the International Development Association of the World Bank. The Senator, who voted against a long-term aid authorization, added that he would "strongly favor" long-term authority for U.S. contributions to an internationalized aid effort.

Mr. Fulbright spelled out in persuasive and constructive terms why he has shifted so categorically to the multilateral approach. Basically, his thesis is that aid should be changed "from something resembling a private gratuity to a community responsibility." In our own country, "Higher income people provide the bulk of the tax money to finance public services of which the poor are the principal beneficiaries . . . The rich pay not as a private act of *noblesse oblige* but in fulfillment of a social responsibility, and the poor receive benefits not as a lucky gratuity but as the right of citizens." In approaching foreign aid, however, the United States and other aid-givers shun this "principle of public

responsibility which underlies progressive taxation and the social services we provide for our own people."

The experience of the United States in its aid relationships has in many cases clearly confirmed Mr. Fulbright's warning that over a long period of time, charity has a debilitating effect on both its intended beneficiary and its provider, "fostering attitudes of 'cranky dependency or simple anger' on the part of the recipient and of self-righteous frustration on the part of the donor." While it would be highly desirable for our aid to be channeled increasingly through multilateral agencies, however, Senator Fulbright goes too far in dismissing bilateral aid altogether at a time when the Soviet Union remains cool to multilateral aid initiatives.

For the present, bilateral development aid would appear to be an inescapable tool in our aid chest. It is necessary both to counter politically-directed Soviet aid ventures and to serve as a stopgap until an adequate internationalized effort becomes a practical political possibility. This cannot realistically be expected so long as the Vietnam war continues, and yet the development of the major non-Communist developing nations can hardly be deferred pending some now-unforeseen new turn in Vietnam.

The proper course for the United States appears to lie in a combination of greatly increased multilateral aid and bilateral development loans at current or higher levels. Meanwhile, as Senator Fulbright proposes, it is not too soon to begin preparing ground for Soviet participation in the World Bank—"offering, if necessary, to sponsor amendments to the Bank's charter that might make membership more attractive to the Soviet Union."